

School-wide safe play and movement

Wilford School



PREVENTION. CARE. RECOVERY.

Te Kaporeihana Awhina Hunga Whara



“The process worked well because the children were presented with data that included them. They wanted to take action on this to improve their school environment.” Hayley Miller, PE and Health Coordinator / Senior Teacher

Introduction

Wilford School is a multicultural decile 5 school, with a roll of 232, situated in Petone. This case study describes a ThinkSafe Education project to increase safety when students move round the school and play on the adventure playground. It also shows how an action learning project can successfully change its focus to reflect new findings along the way.

What was the issue?

Current data showed that most major accidents happened on the school’s adventure playground. However, data gathered at the start of the project initially seemed to show that most incidents were on hard concrete surfaces. This changed the focus of the project from being specifically the adventure playground to movement round the school in general.

But data obtained later in the project showed that the incidents on the two adventure playgrounds were actually higher than expected. In the end the project evolved to address both general movement round the school and playground safety.

What did the school do?

Investigation:

The school set up a register to record all injuries and incidents that came to the attention of the office, instead of reporting only the serious incidents as had been the previous practice.

After four weeks of analysing the register, a school-wide playground survey was conducted. The survey results showed that most injuries occurred on hard concrete surfaces. Year 3-6 children were found to be most at risk, which corresponded with ACC data that this age group had the most injuries.

Safe movement was already modelled by teachers in the junior school, but at middle school level safe behaviour was expected, but not necessarily reinforced or modelled. For instance, after assemblies there was a tendency for many children to run back to class - while no accidents had occurred yet, there was potential for injury.

Interventions (action plan):

Because they were most at risk, year 3-6 students were targeted with an injury prevention unit, taught intensively over two weeks. The unit was based on the ThinkSafe Education resource and SPARC's Kiwisport Fundamental Skills.

During this unit, it became evident that the data from the playground survey was not reliable because it had required children to recall accidents from the previous term. This had been difficult for juniors in particular, as each child had a different interpretation of what an accident was. The number of injuries happening on the adventure playground was actually a lot higher than first thought.

As a result, the intervention in the end focussed not only on moving round the school, but also on playing safely on the adventure playground.

What happened as a result?

The students conveyed their injury prevention messages to the whole school with visual signs dotted round the school, presentations at assembly, and through the newsletter and school website.

Duty teachers noted that after the intervention, children were playing games of tag on the field rather than round the adventure playground. Movement round the school was much more controlled. Overall pupils were considering the way they moved round the school, especially as whole classes or large groups. This was also due to teachers being more aware of voicing their expectations to the class.

Staff and pupils were using the language of injury prevention in different aspects of school life. With pupils now experienced in identifying risk and developing solutions, they have become involved in risk assessment during PE lessons and outdoor lessons.

How well did it work?

The number of accidents occurring round the school was reduced in the short term.

The project had high student involvement, with good buy-in from the whole school. It made everyone think and act responsibly when moving around the school or playing on the adventure playground. Students were engaged because the research involved them. They wanted to take action to resolve the issues.

Teachers felt that the project encouraged action on issues they had often talked about, but had been previously too busy to do. Solutions were simple yet effective, often pinpointing practices that had been let go, or that were just expected without being reinforced. Through teachers emphasising safe practice, pupils could identify risks and the rationale behind them.

What will they do in the future?

At the start of the year, all classes will develop a Code of Conduct for safe play in the playground. At the same time, teachers will set their expectations of how students are to move round the school safely.

The school's health and safety committee intends to look at the procedure for registering accidents, and will also review the health and safety policy.

Want more information?
Visit www.acc.co.nz/injury-prevention/schools.